

Areas of Chestnut Oak Forest with a dense heath shrub layer occur near the gap between Cold and Panthertail summits, on the north side of Mill Creek at the southern edge of the site, and in scattered fashion on the south-facing slope above the Toxaway River. This community has a shrub layer of mountain laurel and rosebay rhododendron and supports a sparse herb layer. A Chestnut Oak Forest with a very dense rosebay rhododendron shrub layer is present on steep slopes often adjacent to and in transition to Acidic Cove Forest. The largest extent of this community occurs on the north-facing slopes of the Toxaway River. This community is dominated by chestnut oak and red oak mixed with mesophytic hardwoods such as tulip poplar and silverbell (*Halesia tetraptera*). The heath understory is dominated by rosebay rhododendron with varying amounts of buckberry. Galax is the dominant herb, along with nodding whorled-aster and hay-scented fern.

Acidic Cove Forest is the dominant riparian forest community occurring along the headwaters, tributaries, and main stem of the Toxaway River. Large, mature examples of this community are present with some trees as large as 41 inches in diameter and snags with trunks as large as 55 inches in diameter. This community is dominated by mature eastern hemlock, red oak, red maple, black birch, yellow birch (*B. alleghaniensis*), Fraser's magnolia (*Magnolia fraseri*), and silverbell. Mature Carolina hemlock are occasionally mixed-in with the eastern hemlocks. Unfortunately some of the larger hemlock trees are heavily infested with the hemlock wooly adelgid (*Adelges tsugae*). The understory of this community is dominated by rosebay rhododendron and mountain dog-hobble (*Leucothoe fontanesiana*) with buckberry, mountain holly (*Ilex montana*), and witch-hazel present as well. An uncommon shrub, ashy hydrangea (*Hydrangea cinerea*), grows in rocky areas within this community. The herb layer is sparse, though species of interest such as tway-blade orchid (*Listera smalli*) and seepage rush (*Juncus gymnocarpus*) do occasionally occur. Forested cliff complexes and rocky ravines are found throughout the Acidic Cove Forest above the Toxaway River and along tributary streams. Ravines within this community, particularly along the Toxaway River, harbor rare rock-shag (*Ephebe solida*) and water-fan lichen (*Hydrothyria venosa*). Winter wrens (*Troglodytes troglodytes*) are common summer residents in the dense heath understory of these Acidic Cove Forests.

MANAGEMENT AND PROTECTION: A portion of the south side of Panthertail Mountain and some of Ravenrock Mountain are already under conservation easement with the North American Land Trust. The north side of Cold Mountain is managed by the U.S. Forest Service (Nantahala National Forest). Private landowners own portions of Panthertail Mountain, Ravenrock Mountain, and most of Cold Mountain outside the National Forest. Due to the high quality natural communities and rare species present, these private lands would be good targets for permanent conservation. Unfortunately, development is impending for some of the more accessible slopes of Panthertail and Ravenrock mountains that are not already under conservation easement.

Proper management of steep slopes is important for this area, as the soils are very erosion-prone. Due to paving and widening of Cold Mountain Road in the autumn of 2006, impacts have already occurred to Shower Falls and roadside populations of rare plants. Sediment from road